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STUDENT ATTITUDES AND TEACHER JUDGMENT OF STUDENT ATTITUDES.

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THROUGH INTERVIEWS BY A PSYCHOLOGIST AT TWO DIFFERENT HIGH SCHOOLS, AN MQ-SORT INSTRUMENT WAS DEVELOPED. THE INSTRUMENT CONSISTED OF 100 STATEMENTS CONCERNING GRADES, TEACHERS, ACTIVITIES, AND LEARNING. TEACHERS SORTED THE STATEMENTS THE WAY THEY THOUGHT MOST STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL WOULD SORT THEM. STUDENTS SORTED THEM TO DESCRIBE THEIR PERSONAL FEELINGS. THE TEACHERS' SORT WAS CLOSER TO THAT OF STUDENTS WITH LOW GRADES THAN TO THOSE MAKING HIGHER GRADES. THEY ALSO RELATED MORE CLOSELY WITH BOYS THAN WITH GIRLS. IN COMPARING WITH THE STUDENT POPULATION AS A WHOLE, TEACHERS SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERRATED STUDENTS ON--(1) THE VALUE STUDENTS PLACE UPON LEARNING, (2) THEIR ENJOYMENT OF SCHOOL WORK AND EXTRA WORK, AND (3) THE IMPORTANCE STUDENTS GIVE TO SCHOOL AND ITS MEANING TO THEIR FUTURE. (AUTHOR)

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Abstract

Through interviews by a psychologist at two different high schools, an MQ-Sort instrument was developed. The instrument consisted of 100 statements concerning grades, teachers, activities, and learning.

Teachers sorted the statements the way they thought most students in the school would sort them. Students sorted them to describe their personal feelings.

The teachers' Sort was closer to that of students with low grades than to those making higher grades. They also related more closely with boys than with girls.

In comparing with the student population as a whole, teachers significantly underrated students on (1) the value students place upon learning, (2) their enjoyment of school work and extra work, and (3) the importance students give to school and its meaning to their future.

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The Setting

The entry of a large urban high school (2,250 enrollment) at Portland, Oregon, into a highly experimental program occasioned the need for an assessment of student values and attitudes. The experimental program uses a weekly cycle of 21 modules or periods of 20 minutes length per day and is computer generated. The attitudes and values of students is critical in the fact that 36 percent of their weekly time is scheduled for independent study. This provides the opportunity for students to use special facilities as they desire and to confer individually with teachers and counselors. It challenges teachers to review curriculum and instruction in a new sense.

The assessment of student values has been made in a number of ways for a number of purposes. Gage³ ran a series of experiments in the 1950's which studied teachers' perceptions of pupils. This included student attitudes and values. Battle¹ tied student values and teacher perceptions of these values to grades.

The development of the MQ-Sort and its administration to students in the below described effort was an adaption of the method so well described by Block² in an assessment of personality. The administration of the MQ-Sort instrument to faculty members served to point up areas in which teachers are operating in ignorance or under mistaken judgment.

An inspection of these results served as considerable reassurance to a faculty entered upon an experimental program. The school is in a low socio-economic neighborhood, and yet favorable attitudes toward school and learning prevailed among students.

Procedure

The foundation of the MQ-Sort is 100 statements concerning grades, teachers, school, activities, learning and other school-associated ideas. These statements were developed from reports of student interviews at two different high schools. The interviews were conducted with a random sample of each high school student body by a research psychologist. The sample consisted of 150 students at one school and 160 at the other. In order to gain rapport and stimulate student thinking in the intended direction, each student was interviewed three times within two weeks.

The interviews were relatively unstructured, but the interviewer kept the discussion to a consideration of the student's school life and school related thoughts. Some of the leading questions used at times in both schools were: "What kinds of things seem to make it easier for you to learn?" What do you think you are learning from school?" "What do you think about social groups in the high school?" At Marshall High School, where the experimental program had been introduced, each student was asked concerning his feelings about the new program.

From the interview protocols, statements were selected which represent the kinds of things high school young people say about school. Altogether 197 statements were drawn from the data. Through rough categorization and careful study, the 197 were reduced to 100 statements about schools, teachers, grades, learning, and the like. The statements taken from the protocols were held to their wordings, consequently they were within the framework of student perceptions.

MQ-Sort Statements

(A sample of 10 taken from the 100.)

1. I wouldn't care for school at all if I didn't have things like sports, clubs, journalism, student council, etc.
7. I want to keep my grades about the same as my group.
8. I know my counselor and go for help whenever I need it.
18. I think it is real important to get a diploma so I can get a job.
26. Sometimes I feel completely burdened with homework.
28. I put school work off until the last thing.
39. I am learning school subjects in school which will help both now and in the future.
44. If I can pick my own topic, I can get a lot more interested in it.
45. It is important for me to come to school to see and be with the other kids.
68. I do best when I can work on a problem with one or more others.

A random sample of 160 students was drawn from the total enrollment of 2,250. Students who had been interviewed had experienced a unique opportunity to think about the ideas incorporated in the instrument. On this account the few who appeared in the sample were rejected. The sample was drawn in proportion to the number of boys and girls enrolled in each class.

Table I
Number of Students Who Completed the Sort by Grade and Sex

	Freshmen		Sophomores		Juniors		Seniors	
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G
Proportional Sample	20	22	20	23	19	23	15	18
Completed Sort	19	21	17	22	16	23	14	18

Completed sorts were obtained from 150 students. Of the 10 who did not complete the sort, some avoided the task, some began it, left for a class and did not return to finish it, and one was so frustrated by the decisions that after two hours, she left and refused to complete it. Teachers who were returning the following year were asked to do the MQ-Sort but with a slightly different approach. They were asked to select the items not as they applied to them but "the way they thought the students would sort them." The plan was to develop a comparison of

teacher judgment regarding the value structure of students with the students own choices and priorities. It would reveal whether teachers underestimated students or overestimated them in certain respects. Administration of the instrument to the students and to teachers came in the final three weeks of school.

The MQ-Sort, as an instrument prepared for use, consists of 100 statements, each typed on a separate 3 x 5 card. The person doing the Sort places the 100 separate statements in nine separate stacks conforming roughly to the normal distribution curve. The stacks are to be arranged with the following number of cards in them:

1 4 11 21 26 21 11 4 1

The statement in the left stack will be the one with which the sorter most strongly agrees. The next four on the left will be the ones with which he next most strongly agrees. This continues on across to the 26 in the middle which seem neutral or not to apply to him. Across to the right of the 26 are the ones with which he disagrees. The last stack on the right (consisting of only one card) is the statement with which the sorter most strongly disagrees.

Teachers using the same set of directions as the students were asked to sort the cards "the way you think most of the students in the high school would sort them."

The length of time needed to do the Sort was from 45 minutes to two hours. The average was approximately one hour. An interesting observation of the investigators was the intense concentration given to the task by the students. Not a single case was observed in which the student seemed to be taking the task lightly. Apparently these value statements had meaning for them.

By means of numbers on the backs of the cards, the items as sorted in each stack were recorded. A record of each individual sort was placed on two

data processing cards. Through the Western Data Processing Center, the data were treated in a number of ways.

Discussion

With the stacks numbered from #1 at the strongly agree and to #9 at the strongly disagree end, a mean choice was determined for the 150 students. Using these means, the 100 statements were placed in the rank order which 150 students gave them from STRONGLY AGREE to NEUTRAL to STRONGLY DISAGREE. The same was done for the group of eighty-five faculty members who sorted the cards as they thought students would sort them. The three items with which students most STRONGLY AGREE differ from the teachers' choices. Students chose:

School is important so I can get an education.
I am learning school subjects in school which will help me both now and in the future.
I feel that high school is important so I can go to college and get a better job.

All three of these deal with the importance of education. The perspective of teachers upon the teacher-learner situation was strong in three of their four choices. The teachers viewed their role as much more important to students than students saw it. Teachers thought students would choose:

I learn best when teachers explain things so I can understand them.
I should study more than I do.
Teachers who can feel some of the things kids feel make it easier for me to learn.
Learning is best for me when a teacher is humorous and makes class fun.

Student choices of items with which they STRONGLY DISAGREE are consistent in expressing their high regard for the importance of schooling. At this lower end of the scale they place:

I have thought seriously about dropping out.
I really wouldn't be going to school if I didn't have to.
I don't see how learning school subjects will help me.
All I want to do in school is just get by.
I don't like school.

Teachers' biases still slightly show as they anticipate "subjects" and "large group" teaching in the STRONGLY DISAGREE choice of students. They thought students would disagree most strongly with:

I like all my subjects.
I don't like school.
I am a "hood."
I learn more in large groups.
My main ambition is to be in the high prestige club.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Formula provided a valuable tool for comparison of the two groups. This goodness-of-fit test compared the placement of items in each sorted stack by the total student group with the placement by the total teacher group. Subgroups of students were compared. This inspection of subgroups revealed a relatively consistent viewpoint by students upon individual items, but the dimension of sex contained a cumulative effect in one direction. Comparing boys' choices with girls' choices in each class revealed little difference. Junior girls did not differ with junior boys at the .05 level of significance on a single item. Freshmen girls and boys differed on only one item; seniors on three items; and sophomores on four.

Bearing out this consistency the freshman and sophomore sample compared with the junior and senior sample revealed only three items with a significant difference; two at the .05 level and one at the .001 level. The one at the .001 level is "I have only vague ideas about what I want to do when I am out of school." Freshmen and sophomore students agreed more often with this statement than did juniors and seniors.

Although these differences between student groups on individual items were not great, they proved to be consistent differences which ran in the same direction. This was proven when the teachers' sorts were compared with the subgroups of the student sample. Teachers identified to a greater extent with

boys in sorting the cards. They also identified to a greater extent with the students getting lower grades. This resulted in teachers underestimating the student population as a whole.

In all, teachers' sorts of the items (the way they thought students would sort them) were significantly different from students' sorts at the .05 level on 41 items. This difference reached the .001 level of significance in the case of 21 items.

Students quite STRONGLY AGREED with these items when teachers thought they would DISAGREE with them:

I think learning depends more upon me than upon the teacher.
I work to learn in school.

In general teachers did not give students credit for assuming this much responsibility.

Students also AGREED with these items when teachers thought they would not:

I work better when I can go off on my own and get it done.
I know my counselor and go for help whenever I need it.
I enjoy doing school work.
I manage to keep busy learning other things when my school work is done.
I enjoy doing extra work for extra credit.

Teachers thought students would STRONGLY AGREE with these statements when students classed them as NEUTRAL or DO NOT APPLY:

I just don't seem to be able to get down to business in my free time.
It is important for me to come to school to see and be with the other kids.
I don't always do my homework.

Teachers thought students would AGREE with these statements when actually students as a whole DISAGREED with them:

It all depends on the teacher. If I like the teacher, I like the subject. I have only vague ideas about what I want to do when I am out of school. I put school work off until the last thing.

Students DISAGREED STRONGLY with these statements when teachers thought they would be unconcerned or NEUTRAL about them:

I want to keep my grades about the same as my group.
I just get bored when a teacher wants me to do reading or writing.
I do less than the teacher assigns.

There were significant differences for 11 items between students with high grades and those with low grades. This was greater than the difference between any two other student groups. The items are what one might predict. Of the following four, students with lower grades tended to disagree more with the first two and agree more with the last two than did students with higher grades.

I like all my subjects.
I enjoy doing extra work for extra credit.
I don't always do my school work.
I just don't seem to be able to get down to business in my free time.

There were others of a similar nature.

The identification of teachers with students who make low grades is borne out in this fact: Teachers differ significantly with high students upon more than twice as many items as they do with students who have low grades. Since girls as a group have significantly higher grades than boys, this accounts for the closer identification teachers show for boys than for girls.

Summary of Findings

1. Teachers felt that students would be most highly concerned about teaching and the teacher-learner relationship, but students were not highly concerned about this. Their highest concern dealt with the importance of

getting an education. The same point was illustrated by STRONGLY DISAGREE choices of the two groups and again by the STRONGLY DISAGREE choices.

2. Subgroups of students were compared. The value system was quite consistent between most groups. The two variables which produced statistically significant differences were sex and grade point average.
3. The two statements upon which teachers most widely misjudged student feelings were:

"I think learning depends more upon me than upon the teacher."
"I work to learn in school."

Students STRONGLY AGREED with these and teachers thought they would DISAGREE with them.

4. Teachers estimates of the value system of all students more nearly coincided with the subgroup having low grades and with boys.
5. For the student population as a whole, teachers significantly underrated students concerning the value they place upon learning.

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